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ABSTRACT

As part of an effort to improve the image of Mercer County Community College, in New Jersey, a faculty member conducted interviews of 15 colleagues and 4 students to determine their perceptions of the college. Participants were asked about their present attitudes towards the college, their views when they first began, what the college does best, what they would like to change, their most memorable and creative moments, effective teaching strategies, their biggest challenge, and their ideal vision of the community college. The interviews revealed the following sources of negative images for the college: (1) the connection with living at home, thereby denying the student the freedom and prestige associated with going away to a residential school; (2) the open-access policy implies to some that the college is not competitive and does not have rigorous programs; (3) some high school counselors and college faculty perpetuate the negative image; (4) lack of affiliation with the school after graduation; and (5) lack of sense of history and tradition due to the community college's short existence. These sources suggest improvements in the areas of marketing, alumni relations, and professional development. A list of faculty and students interviewed and the survey instruments are appended. (TGI)

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THE IMAGE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: FACULTY PERCEPTIONS AT MERCER COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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THE IMAGE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: FACULTY PERCEPTIONS AT MERCER COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

> They are derided as college-light, embraced as a place for transcript damage control, and praised as a ladder into the middle class.... community colleges -- two year post secondary schools -- have boomed in the last thirty years....Changes in the economy and changes in the college experience have given community colleges vast populations to serve. Can they be all things to all people and remain a stepchild of American higher education?...Our perceptions of them are mixed.
> (Ray Suarez, "Talk of the Nation," National Public Radio, Aug. 17, 1995)

The genius of the community college is its open-access policy. The paradox of the community college is that its open-accessibility, its non-exclusive admissions policy, and its multitude of traditional and non-traditional course offerings also threaten to be its nemesis. Viewed by one segment of the community as a chance to achieve the American Dream, the community college is viewed by another segment as a stigmatized, second class institution - a college of last resort. And the stigma is often an impediment to those students seeking transfer to baccalaureate-granting colleges.

It has certainly been problematic for me for the past twenty-five years as a teacher in a transfer program. My frustration comes from the fact that this view is held most often by those who have never availed themselves of the opportunities the community college offers. Seeking to elevate the image of the community college, to remove the stigma or alleviate it, I sought possible solutions by looking within. I interviewed fifteen faculty colleagues representing the four academic divisions of the college to gather their perceptions about the college and about their roles as teachers. In addition, I interviewed four students of different ages, backgrounds, and programs of study. Their answers illuminated the pertinent issues, beginning with the image of the college, now and then.

> ***If you were an artist commissioned to paint your image of the community college <u>now</u>, what would your painting be like?***
>
> ***If you had done your painting during your first years of teaching (at the community college), would it have been the same or different from your painting now? If different, what influences resulted in the change?***

Although the paintings of the community college <u>now</u> varied in scale and type -- realistic, abstract, a mural, a mosaic, a collage -- each contained elements common to them all: students were <u>always</u> the primary (and in some cases the only) focus. They would be multi-cultural and diverse -- characters of all nationalities, races, ages, and handicaps.

If the professor were in the painting at all, s/he was always a secondary figure and would be portrayed as the catalyst, the guide, someone who "triggers a eureka reaction."

The setting was often outdoors: occasionally the buildings would be in the background. The outdoor setting could indicate the freedom, the options, the opportunities offered by the community college, or it could indicate an escape from the vagaries of the college's HVAC system.

Some of the paintings clearly were meant to be controversial: "the images would all come together in a way that might not please a lot of people, but would fairly realistically embody what a community college is all about. Sometimes it is beautiful; sometimes it's not. Sometimes it's hard to interpret; sometimes it's not. So that it's not going to be a picture that you are going to be able to look at and have different people come to a common agreement about what they are seeing." Here is the paradox in the form of a painting.

A few of the paintings depicted a kind of idealized image of the community college. "I imagine that we are part of whatever the university is historically about; we are about learning....There would be a small group of students and some thumbed-up hard books and notebooks in front of them. The setting is out in the yard doing something awfully traditional. My view of the community college is, if anything, becoming more old-fashioned."

The paintings from the first years of teaching (with one exception) depicted a more structured relationship between teacher and students, a more traditional classroom setting. They also revealed a bit of culture shock on the part of the teachers: many expected that the students would be better, more prepared, more interested in the content and issues circulating at the time. "My painting <u>then</u> would have been a one-dimensional realistic painting, not the collage-type thing that I now...view the community college as. It would be a one-dimensional painting where I saw things much more in black and white and not as in the many shades of gray as I now see. My expectations have changed. Unfortunately, I've become much more realistic."

Some of the <u>now</u> paintings addressed the current trend of thought regarding the delivery of education as a consumer/product/market model. "Courses cannot be packaged like soda cans, lined up on supermarket shelves and sold in six-packs to students....I'm really beginning to resist more and more the idea that students are consumers and that the college is some sort of large market place that's in competition with some other sellers of goods and that our courses are somehow products that we market to an unsuspecting consumer who pays for what he gets. I have to resist that model because I think it is destructive. I was probably more comfortable with it five years ago than I am now."

For some, the impact of technology played a significant role in the differences between the <u>then</u> and <u>now</u> paintings: "from an informational standpoint (in the library) maybe only 50% of what I do today is what I did in 1981. Now I work much more to make the students self-sufficient, using critical thinking, reasoning, logic to do their own searches using electronic means."

A sharper and more in-depth view of the college as a whole was delineated through responses to:

What one thing does the community college do the best?

If you could change <u>one</u> thing, what would it be?

The unanimous answer to the first question related directly to the open-access policy:

- it rescues lost souls
- it gives people a second and third and nth chance
- it's almost like a miracle worker at times -- dealing with the diverse student body
- it's a good place to start
- it offers hope that goes beyond the academic.

The advocacy and support of the open-access policy was immediate and unequivocal. "It is the college for people...who come here, somehow, 'damaged goods'...I think we succeed [with them] better than anybody....Sometimes what we are doing is getting them back upright and then showing them another path to take because the path they were on wasn't getting them where they wanted to go. So it's more about direction and about support, so that people can be what they were always able to be, but they couldn't do it on their own. In a sense, some people need to walk with crutches before they can learn to jog, and we're willing to let people have their time on the crutches."

The theme of nurturing, caring, supporting was dominant in all the interviews. It was the one, over-riding characteristic that distinguished the community college from other institutions of higher education in the minds of the interviewees:

- it develops self-esteem, self-confidence, a rounding-off and fine-tuning experience
- it gives people an opportunity to prove that they are/can be students
- it provides an atmosphere with lots of warm, personal attention -- a lot of nurturing.

By contrast to the unanimity of the responses to the first question, the second elicited answers that were as diverse as the interviewees themselves.

Three of the fifteen saw as primary the need to change the image of the college. The responses indicated that the change should occur in the way the college promotes and advertises itself: "We need to get the message out about how awesome the community college is." "We should advertise the college positively; the negative message comes, in part, from the high schools. "I've heard of [high school] counselors referring to the college as 'last ditch Mercer.'"

One interviewee felt that the negative image originates within the college. In his opinion there is a widespread feeling among faculty that they are somehow less than they could have been because they are teaching at a community college. "So that what we do best, we do almost under protest."

An improvement in the faculty/administration relationship emerged in two other responses for change. While one sought to establish a better working relationship between the two groups, the other felt that the administration should be more nurturing of the faculty. The latter attributed the less than adequate relationship between the administration and faculty to the different priorities held by each group.

The influence of technology on how and what we teach was another area of concern. Regarding how we teach, the perception was that the community college was heading in the direction of relying on, and to some extent replacing, human contact and human judgment with technology, and this was seen as an easy way out. Regarding what we teach, many responses described a general shift at the community college to offer skills courses to the exclusion of humanities (general education) areas of study. The perceptions were that what needs to be changed is "...the dangerous tendency to descend into anti-academic, anti-intellectual approaches; that is, that only technology matters. This is a total contradiction to critical thinking."

The concern for the way education is delivered, especially the consumer/product/market model, surfaced again several times in response to the question about what should be changed. "The idea of being providers of services in the same way as a supermarket -- that's a dangerous metaphor. That is regressing. But that's the desired direction -- that we should strive to offer courses twenty-four hours a day, condensing them ad absurdum,. because the people who are taking them are in a hurry to get where they want to go."

Other individual responses looked for the outcomes of change in the following areas:

- more training in how to reach our students
- reduced teaching loads ("so I can do more justice to my students")
- employment of more full-time faculty and less reliance on adjuncts to insure more stability and continuity in the programs
- new or better means to increase the bonding between the students and the community college (establish a sense of alma mater)
- reconfigured instructional spaces reflecting a seminar-type setting rather than the traditional hierarchical classroom
- reduced barriers to admission -- lowering admission costs and keeping charges at rock bottom.

Perhaps the most idealistic desired outcome was a societal change: "I would like to see a change in society (that I don't think is going to happen) reflected by the students at the community college and elsewhere that is more tolerant and more civil. I see the

breakdown in civility affecting our institutions -- in Congress, in the legal system, and in the classroom. We are getting to the point now where...we can't address certain issues -- about race, about politics -- because either people have the talk show mentality where they want to confront or they...pretend that there is no problem....How does that affect the community college? With the diverse group of students we have ethnically and academically, if we don't keep that open atmosphere...people are going to get into their own little worlds and look into their own little perspectives and their own self-interest areas, and...we are going to Vulcanize ourselves. At the community college where we have such diversity, that's the worst thing that could happen."

When interviewing the faculty about their image of the community college, it was important to have them reflect on their role as teachers. The mission of the community college gives rise to the kind of originality that is needed to succeed as a teacher. So, the mission and the teaching are one and the same -- they are integral parts of the one whole.

To discover and explore the ideal moments in teaching, I asked:

> ***What was your major/most significant/most memorable moment in teaching?***
>
> ***We've all had moments when "teaching works" -- when things have been as close to ideal as possible. What is going on when this happens...and...can you replicate it?***
>
> ***What do you see in other faculty as their most creative moments?***

For the majority of the faculty the most memorable moments were when there was unexpected enlightenment or a heightened motivation from the student(s) -- when they saw the light go on in someone's eyes. "Every once in a while...you look at the class and the class goes 'ah hah'! Just for a fleeting second it clicks. Click. You can almost hear the click. And the mask kind of falls away from them."

An almost equal number of responses referred to those moments when the faculty knew they had made a difference in someone's life. Whether it came in the form of a letter, a phone call, or a personal visit, the positive feedback was very gratifying. "Things happen incrementally that keep you going and make you know that you are making a difference. Having students tell you that you are making a difference keeps any negative feelings or cynicism from developing in one and taking over."

One respondent's major achievement was receiving the Distinguished Teaching Award. She felt it was probably the best thing that had ever happened to her and she could not believe it. "I'd worked so hard for so long and then somebody noticed one day!"

Perhaps the most moving response was the memory of this moment: "It was watching the visually-impaired student with whom I had worked so closely be chosen as commencement speaker and go up onto the stage to tell the whole graduation [audience]

what it was like for her at Mercer and how it was a dream come true for her because her parents didn't even want her to leave the house....She was dean's list -- she just excelled beyond anything she had dreamed of and she became the commencement speaker....That was my greatest moment, too, because...she asked me to accompany her to the stage."

When asked to recall the creative moments of <u>other</u> faculty, most of the interviewees referred to their own attempts as creativity in teaching. Perhaps this is due to the nature of teaching itself -- it's done in the privacy and isolation of one's own classroom. A faculty member rarely has the opportunity to observe or to be knowledgeable about another's experience. The few who were able to talk about the creative moments of others identified two major, contributing characteristics: supreme preparation and caring. They referred to the kind of preparation that is so thorough that it can accommodate and bolster improvisation in the classroom. It can be a trigger for success; the more you prepare, the more effortless it appears. "Their most creative moments are when they put aside the curriculum and what they have planned for the day, and just have to go off on a tangent because a student has demonstrated some extraordinary interest in a subject or a point and the rest of the class also needs that. Creativity on your feet...improvisation."

They also spoke of "artistically spiritual" colleagues whose caring ignites enthusiasm and releases latent talents in the students. "They have such an enthusiasm and such an attachment to their students that they get [them] to do extraordinary things....Teaching is an art form. It is both emotionally stimulating and emotionally draining....It is improvisation all the time. You have to get into a mode, almost, and then all of a sudden you become creative in the act of teaching. It is not something that can be planned with a course outline."

The consensus was that the creative teaching mix included both ingredients: "You have to love people and you have to believe that your discipline has significance and life and importance. Creative moments are when you see [teachers expressing] passion for their discipline, not only caring for the student." It is a given that teaching is an art, not a science, and therefore, it is very difficult to replicate the ideal moments. One can strive to replicate them and there are triggers to do this. Implicit in every response was the belief that the major trigger is to demystify the classroom, to remove whatever anxiety there is and to encourage questions. An accepting atmosphere will be one of the most important triggers. "If you have good rapport with your students, if they don't feel that they will be belittled or ridiculed, that there isn't even an unspoken 'oh well, what can you expect with him or her'" -- that is the ideal.

Teaching and learning is a duet between the instructor and the students. It is a mutually-reciprocal experience the success of which is difficult to attribute. This is especially true in the community college classroom which presents the ultimate challenge to the teacher. Working with an extremely diverse group of students fosters, by necessity, the development of numerous adaptive teaching skills and strategies, especially since many community college teachers have little (if any) training in how to teach. The responses to:

> ***In all of your teaching, what one thing do you really like doing?***
>
> ***Do you have a special strategy/device/method/technique that works very, very well for you?***

revealed more than teaching strategies. Underlying emotional elements, concomitants of the teaching/learning experience, also emerged.

Three modes of teaching were preferred: the classroom setting, one-on-one with students, and the lecturing format. It was interesting to note the correlation of preferred mode and academic discipline. Faculty who most preferred the classroom situation taught English, foreign languages, psychology, and law. "I like the actual teaching in the classroom itself because there's a dynamic there and you never know what to expect. Every day is different." "It's the students being willing to stretch themselves, to look beyond the surface, when they are willing to speculate." The one-on-one setting was preferred by faculty in basic skills and counseling. "I like when I sit down with one student and we really hammer something out, and we both agree that something has happened." Faculty from engineering, science, and computer science preferred the lecture format. "I like some aspects of lecturing -- that satisfies the ham in all of us." "I like getting in front of a class of fifteen to twenty-five people and trying to lead them through [the material] and getting them to see things....There's a performance aspect to it. It's ego-gratification."

It was not surprising that the respondents' favorite teaching strategies and/or techniques would be numerous and varied. Humor was cited most often as the device that works particularly well as an antidote to apathy, unresponsiveness and lack of motivation. It was regarded as a foolproof technique. Several of the faculty, particularly in the liberal arts, used collaborative learning techniques with good results. "It's an ideal technique for ESL and foreign language classes. In language classes it's very hard to give everyone the opportunity to speak very much if you work together as a [single] group. In [individual] groups they are able to practice a lot more. They read to each other, they dictate to each other, and they ask questions of each other [in order] to practice enough verbally."

The need to keep the subject fresh, new and interesting, not only for the students but the teachers as well, led many of them to try strategies that involved changes each semester, even though the result often meant more work for themselves. "Every semester I teach every course differently. I'm always making new things. Always being prepared, no matter what. I hate the thought of [being] unprepared, and I like to have something new. It has to be fresh -- finding new readings, new exercises, new topics." "To keep it lively

for me, too, I keep changing the textbooks, I keep changing courses....Because when you teach [four sections of] two English courses, at thirty students per class, 120 writing students each semester, it's a great way to die!"

Various other preferred techniques/strategies that proved to be effective included:

- taking sincere personal interest in each student
- keeping an open mind about the outside pressures affecting some students
- creating a new way to teach French with music (French aerobics)
- ensuring a non-threatening classroom environment
- providing support, praise, caring, and high expectations.

The challenges, of course, are many. Consequently, replies to the questions:

What is the biggest challenge you face as a teacher?
How do you respond to it?

were greatly varied. One third of the interviewees, all of whom in this instance teach in the liberal arts, responded that their greatest challenge was the non-responsive class, the students who simply don't respond. One of these teachers said it this way: "The biggest challenge I face as a teacher is 'the nothing.' In the movie 'The Never Ending Story,' there is a monster that is taking over. A monstrous, dark cloud is rolling in and taking over all of life and all people and creatures -- and it's called 'the nothing.' It's a kind of pollution that invades your system so that you become so depressed and unmotivated that you don't want to do anything and you don't have any interest in anything. And 'the nothing' is destroying the earth. My biggest challenge as a teacher is to walk into a classroom where a lot of people have already become infected with 'the nothing.'"

How do they respond to 'the nothing' class or student? "I simply don't know what to do with them. I'm utterly bewildered when they don't respond. And there always are some." "How I respond is not very nice. I become very angry, very angry with them and myself....Well, they've spent their money [for the course]. They've bought a product..... These are people who don't want to learn. They just want a grade. And sometimes you get in their way." "I try to show my students that what you can learn in college is to think and that [the humanities] are a training ground for thinking and reaching informed conclusions, speculating, being able to analyze a situation and take all the parts and synthesize them."

Three other faculty (from technical areas and mathematics) voiced their frustration in getting even some of the responsive students to learn. "Teaching is easy, but getting someone to learn is hard." "You just work hard and accept the fact that you can't get everybody through."

The challenge of impending burnout affected faculty in all disciplines. They found it difficult to maintain their own enthusiasm and keep the subject fresh for the new student.

One said simply, "I'm getting old as a teacher and I'm reaching the point where, frankly, I'm tired of grading papers. I've had it!"

Other challenges emerged as faculty attempted to meet all the needs of their diverse student populations. One teacher's response: "I try to deal with each student as if s/he were my own child. When a student walks into my office, I [ask myself] if this were my son or daughter, what would I be doing to give him/her the same kind of advice and nurturing that I gave my own kids that obviously succeeded with them?"

There were no quick-fix solutions, just the sense that the faculty would try anything to meet and master the challenges.

The two last questions of the interview asked the faculty to envision their utopian view of the community college ten years hence -- a "best of all possible worlds" scenario, and also, to speculate about what would happen if the community college simply did not exist.

> ***What is your ideal vision of the community college ten years from now?***
> ***Do you think it is possible?***
> ***What has to happen to make your ideal of the future a reality?***
>
> ***If the community college did not exist, would it matter?***

It is not surprising that the faculty's ideal image for the future would focus primarily on new, expanded types of instruction and the new ways they would be delivered:

- greatly expanded, greatly reinforced, greatly enriched general education so that every graduate has a rich experience in general education

- more teaching done by full-time instructors instead of so much reliance on part-time people, thereby providing more continuity and stability at a time when students, courses, and programs are apt to change quickly

- a variety of configurations for scheduling courses, year-round course offerings, and all types of instruction offered in different ways in response to ever more non-traditional students and their diverse lifestyles and time schedules

- more trained professionals to deal with the increasing needs of people of many cultures and students with disabilities

- more liaisons with industry and the working community to meet special training and re-training needs

- extensive use of electronic technology to the extent that it will profoundly alter the way learning occurs.

With regard to this last, one respondent predicted: "Almost one hundred per cent of teaching [will be done] with computers and/or electronic technology." When asked how one reconciles the joys of face-to-face teaching, when "the light goes on," with this ideal image of a future when students learn solely by interacting with machines, he replied, "We'll probably have to give up the joy of teaching that way. We'll have to get the satisfaction a different way. We'll have to find satisfaction in [the fact] that the system has worked as it should and that more people are learning better, more efficiently than [in the] old-fashioned system." How does one quantify that? "Damned if I know! Teacher satisfaction is going to be second hand. If this world comes about, the whole approach to teaching will be different. Although, looking back through history, it probably won't be. After all, once the textbook was invented, in principle we didn't need lectures. But we still fill lecture halls. We'll probably have elements of all aspects [of teaching]."

Stated simply, the community college of the future was envisioned to be what it always has been -- all things to all people -- but on a vastly expanded scale.

For about a third of the interviewees, however, the optimistic and utopian image of their ideal was offset by a pessimistic and dystopian view of a society that could prevent it from happening. As one respondent put it: "I wish I were more optimistic about the community college and higher education in general. The downsizing of government and [the attitude that] the government is the enemy and teachers are overpaid and so forth -- that whole mind set is going to take its toll. I think the community colleges are going to suffer because of lack of funding. We are going to be so budget-conscious, that we are going to make some bad decisions. We are not going to replace people who need to be replaced; we are going to overly-rely on adjuncts where we shouldn't, even though they often do very good jobs. There is a trend to do whatever you can to make the budgetary requirements that are needed. It is going to take its toll. We are seeing it right now....I just see a mean-spiritedness in society and government that...affects education because... educators are really part of the government process in that we get our funding from the government....We are not going to be able to continue with the quality that we've been able to maintain...because the money isn't going to be there."

Another interviewee said it this way: "I would like the attitude toward education to improve, and I think that it can improve if society in general begins valuing teachers once again. This also affects how knowledge is received because it takes a great deal of maturity and a real thirst for knowledge to bypass the niceties of respect and to respect a person for what s/he knows rather than what society thinks about them or says about them."

Would it matter if the community college did not exist? ABSOLUTELY! There was no dissenting opinion there. Our society has become so dependent on it, it has made such an impact in its thirty-plus years, that if it did not exist there would be a huge void in our system of higher education that would not or could not be completely filled by other institutions. "We would become much more of an elitist society, because this is the place

where the non-traditional has an opportunity to buy into the American Dream. America would not be able to exist in the fashion that it does at present. We would not be able to offer an opportunity to a large segment of our populace if we didn't have the community college. They would not have a route to go. The consequences would be absolutely devastating." The community college system, for all its idiosyncrasies, is really the animus that keeps the American Dream alive for a large number of people.

CONCLUSIONS

When I began my research for this paper, the interviews with faculty and students, I did so in the hope that I would find answers or clues to the causes of what I perceived to be a stigmatized or negative image of the community college. The research proved fruitful and several issues emerged that suggest possible solutions or, at the very least, ways to ameliorate the negative image.

First, it is important to acknowledge that the community college is held in very high regard by the vast majority of the population it serves. As I wrote at the outset, the negative view is held most often (but not exclusively) by those who are unfamiliar with or have never availed themselves of the extraordinary range of opportunities the community college offers. Fortunately, this group is in the minority.

The interviews revealed several sources for the negative image:

- It is tied in with being the "home town school," with living at home and commuting, and thereby denying the freedom, sophistication, and prestige associated with going away to a residential school.

- It is easy to get into. Because its open-access policy is often the initial predominant feature of the community college, people tend to forget or ignore the fact that its programs are rigorous and it is hard to get out of; ie. easy grades and graduation are not givens.

- The negative image has been known to be perpetuated by some high school guidance counselors.

- And, some community college teachers themselves are guilty of the same attitude and transmit it, consciously or unconsciously, to their students.

- There tends to be little, if any, sense of alma mater. Graduates tend to maintain ties and closer affiliations with their academic disciplines than with the college as a whole.

- And last, community colleges are relatively new. They have been in existence for a little over thirty years which, in the collegiate world, is not a long time to develop and establish a sense of history and tradition.

This list suggests three areas of the community college where more could be done to elevate its image: marketing, alumni relations and professional development.

Mercer County College already does a very good job in its publicizing efforts. In fact, two of the students interviewed said that advertising is what the college does the best. The school keeps the county residents up-to-date on course offerings, events on campus, and other college-related activities. But as one of the student interviewees, a senior citizen who is president of his own company, pointed out, advertising is not marketing. As he explained, marketing encompasses a lot more than just advertising. In his own company, which specializes in custom home building and renovations, many of his clients hear of him by word of mouth or referrals, but they hire him because of his proven record of excellent work. His successes are his satisfied clients, and he markets his company through the promotion of the work he has done for them.

His comments point up the difference between presentation and promotion. The college already does a very good job in presenting itself. But one of its best promotional vehicles is WWFM, the college's public radio station. Another is the college theatre.

In recent years, Mercer has highlighted the success stories of several graduates. While this is a good beginning, much more could be done in this area to promote the college (and elevate its image). If one way to measure the worth of a college is by the success of its alumni, then Mercer has an excellent opportunity to promote itself through its best resource, its countless successful graduates.

The interviews also pointed out the need for a strong alumni association. The college needs to find out in some energetic, systematic way, who those people are who are proud that they went to Mercer and let their pride invoke the pride of others. Every member of the faculty can identify former students who still keep in touch with them and who value their Mercer experience. Perhaps this is where the project could begin, because students tend to have ties to people in their specific programs of study, not to the college as a whole. Alumni have proved to be valuable members of the college advisory commissions and excellent resources for adjunct faculty. There could very well be a strong correlation between the successful development of a vigorous alumni association and the elevation of the image of the college.

Professional development programs for faculty are invaluable in providing opportunities for re-energizing one's professional spirit, for healing the effects of burnout, and generally refreshing one's outlook in teaching. One interviewee estimated that perhaps half of the faculty at a community college are burdened by a feeling that they are less than they could be because they are doomed to teach under-prepared, under-motivated students (reference "the nothing.") If the faculty's own sense of themselves is negative, it is unlikely that they can uplift their students' sense of themselves, and yet that is precisely what many community college students look for and need. Professional development opportunities such as sabbaticals and release time for conferences and

special projects may not alleviate entirely the professional miasma, but they certainly go a long way toward lessening the symptoms. This paper itself is the result of my year-long involvement in the Mid-Career Fellowship Program at Princeton University, and I can attest to the enriching and rejuvenating effect that experience has had on me.

In the final analysis, the major element implicit in all of the interviews was the validation of the greatness of the community college idea. More than any other institution of higher education, the community college has the flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness that make it possible to offer even more outstanding educational opportunities in the years to come. If our society allows this to happen, we may find that the non-traditional of today will become the traditional of tomorrow.

FACULTY INTERVIEWED

Dr. Andrew W. Conrad
Dean of Liberal Arts

Professor Noreen L. Duncan
English/Communications

Dr. Vera H. Goodkin
French/English

Professor Peter J. Holsberg
Engineering/Computer Science

Susanne Kotch
Counseling/Basic Skills

Professor Jerry Kuhl
Aviation

Professor Melvin D. Leipzig
Painting/Art History

Dr. Regina A. Mezei
English as a Second Language

Professor Judith W. Nygard
English

Professor Pamela A. Price
Director of Library Services

Professor James F. Rowe
Legal Studies

Professor Arthur E. Schwartz
Mathematics

Dr. Dori Seider
Education/Psychology

Dr. Frank B. Slezak
Chemistry

Dr. June B. Valley
English

STUDENTS INTERVIEWED

Mary Banfield
Social Science

Courtney Mansell
Social Science

Carolyn Marfino
Biology

Harry Williams
Architecture

THE FACULTY INTERVIEW

The interviewing technique was based on the principles of naturalistic inquiry which attempts to present "slice of life" episodes documented through natural language and to represent as closely as possible how people feel, what they know, how they know it, and what their concerns, beliefs, perceptions and understandings are. In-person interviews are the typical N/I data collection method.

The following questions were presented in sequence, one at a time, to focus the respondent's thoughts on each one.

1. If you were an artist commissioned to paint your image of the community college now, what would your painting be like?

2. If you had done your painting during your first years of teaching (at the community college), would it have been the same or different from you painting now? If different, what influences resulted in the change?

3. What one thing does the community college do the best?

4. If you could change one thing, what would it be?

5. What was your major/most significant/most memorable moment in teaching?

6. We've all had moments when "teaching works" -- when things have been as close to ideal as possible. What is going on when this happens...and...can you replicate it?

7. What do you see in other faculty as their most creative moments?

8. In all of your teaching, what one thing do you really like doing?

9. Do you have a special strategy/device/method/technique/etc. that works very, very well for you?

10. What is the biggest challenge you face as a teacher? How do you respond to it?

11. What is your ideal vision of the community college ten years from now? Do you think it is possible? What has to happen to make your ideal of the future a reality?

12. If the community college did not exist, would it matter?

THE STUDENT INTERVIEW

The following questions were presented in sequence, one at a time, to focus the respondent's thoughts on each. The interviewing technique was the same as the faculty interview.

1. If you were an artist commissioned to paint your image of the community college now, what would your painting be like?

2. If you had done your painting during your first semester at the community college, would it have been the same or different from your painting now? If different, what influences resulted in the change?

3. What one thing does the community college do the best?

4. If you could change one thing about the community college, what would it be?

5. What is your major/most significant/most memorable moment as a student at the community college?

6. We've all had moments when the light of understanding suddenly goes on -- when what we've been studying or trying to learn all just clicks. Can you identify what is going on for you when this happens...and...can you repeat it?

7. What do you see in your teachers as their most creative moments? What do you see in other students as their most creative moments?

8. Considering the various methods/techniques/approaches that the faculty use in their teaching, what one works the best for you?

9. Do you have a special strategy/device/method/technique of studying that works very, very well for you?

10. What is the biggest challenge you face as a student? How do you respond to it?

11. What is your ideal vision of the community college ten years from now? Do you think it is possible? What has to happen to make you ideal of the future a reality?

12. If the community college did not exist, would it matter?